

# Civilian Research Project Senior Service College Fellow

## Democracy Assistance in the Gulf

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. <b>PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.</b>				
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2012		2. REPORT TYPE Civilian Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Democracy Assistance in the Gulf		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Diana M. Holland		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Institute for the Study of Diplomacy Georgetown University Washington, D.C. 20057		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Ave., Carlisle, PA, 17013-5220		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT DISTRIBUTION A: Unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT The Arab Awakening will be analyzed for many years but the US should consider immediately the meaning of the 2011 events in the context of the autocratic Gulf states. First, the US must reevaluate the policy of supporting dictators for the sake of protecting its national interests. Opposition movements are increasingly aggressive in their demands and without substantive reforms they may attempt to overthrow pro-western governments, thus putting American interests in jeopardy. One means the US might pursue is accelerated democracy assistance efforts. America and Europe have numerous entities with the mission to bring political change around the world. Now might be the time to employ a comprehensive democracy strategy in the Gulf. That strategy, beginning with Oman, should use the collective expertise of American and European programs to influence change in the government and civil society. If Oman and its neighbors make peaceful and substantive reforms, they may avoid a violent Gulf Awakening and create a lasting stability in that strategically-important part of the world.				
15. SUBJECT TERMS Oman, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab Awakening, US Foreign Policy, National Endowment for Peace, USAID, Council of Europe, EIDHR, <i>Stiftungen</i> , Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Non-governmental Organization (NGO), Stability				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES
a. REPORT Unclassified	b. ABSTRACT Unclassified	c. THIS PAGE Unclassified	UNLIMITED	34
			19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Paula Newberg	
			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 202-965-5735	



USAWC CIVILIAN RESEARCH PROJECT

**DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN THE GULF**

by

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This CRP is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Senior Service College Fellowship Program.

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## **ABSTRACT**

**AUTHOR:** COL Diana M. Holland

**TITLE:** Democracy Assistance in the Gulf

**FORMAT:** Civilian Research Project

**DATE:** 1 April 2012      **WORD COUNT:** 5,275      **PAGES:** 34

**KEY TERMS:** Oman, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab Awakening, US Foreign Policy, National Endowment for Peace, USAID, Council of Europe, EIDHR, *Stiftungen*, Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Non-governmental Organization (NGO), Stability

**CLASSIFICATION:** Unclassified

The Arab Awakening will be analyzed for many years but the US should consider immediately the meaning of the 2011 events in the context of the autocratic Gulf states. First, the US must reevaluate the policy of supporting dictators for the sake of protecting its national interests. Opposition movements are increasingly aggressive in their demands and without substantive reforms they may attempt to overthrow pro-western governments, thus putting American interests in jeopardy. One means the US might pursue is accelerated democracy assistance efforts. America and Europe have numerous entities with the mission to bring political change around the world. Now might be the time to employ a comprehensive democracy strategy in the Gulf. That strategy, beginning with Oman, should use the collective expertise of American and European programs to influence change in the government and civil society. If Oman and its neighbors make peaceful and substantive reforms, they may avoid a violent Gulf Awakening and create a lasting stability in that strategically-important part of the world.





## DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN THE GULF

Scholars, analysts and policy-makers derive a number of messages from the 2011 “Arab Awakening.” Some hope that the movement will inaugurate a “new wave” of democratic reforms in a part of the world that has long resisted such change. Others are concerned that the sudden and violent change will bring to power new tyrannies merely guided by a different ideology. Many wonder what it will mean for American national interests in that part of the world.<sup>1</sup> In this time of uncertainty and change, it is important to consider what strategy the United States should implement now that opposition and popular forces have overthrown or substantively challenged – with differing degrees of success - the rulers of Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain and Oman. While observers might agree that the possibility for greater freedom in that part of the world is a positive development, it is difficult to deny that abrupt changes in leadership threaten the stability of the region. One concern for the United States should be the governments of the strategically vital Gulf states which remain in charge but resistant to serious internal reform.

Before progressing further, it is important to discuss briefly the term “stability” as it relates to American foreign policy in the Gulf. For decades, “stability” had positive connotations in regards to certain US interests. The US considered the autocratic families of the Gulf such as Al-Khalifa of Bahrain, Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia, and Al-Sabah of Kuwait, as allies because they maintained order within their borders, allowed US military presence within their borders, and could be counted upon to support western security concerns, i.e. the continuous flow of oil, countering Iranian hegemonic ambitions, and containing Islamic extremism.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the “allies” suppressed basic

rights and freedoms within their states and America's relationships with them had the negative effect in that America was viewed as hypocritical regarding its stated goal of supporting democracy.<sup>3</sup> The perceived hypocrisy could eventually bring anti-American governments to power. Thus, the "stability" that the US seeks in the Gulf might be at risk.

Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush articulated forcefully a vision for a democratic Middle East. Some regimes such as Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait instituted changes partly in response to the American president but also because they sensed dangerous levels of frustration in their populations. Still, those changes did not result in greater democracy. As Daniel Brumberg argues, dictatorships merely morphed into "liberalized autocracies." Unfortunately, those reforms allowed space for controlled dissent but did not substantively diffuse actual power.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the "Arab Awakening" challenged not only the regimes themselves, but also the notion that "stability" through oppression is an acceptable cost for the sake of American national security. Furthermore, the movements sent the message that the small accommodations of the past two decades were not sufficient. In light of these developments, the US should evaluate once again "stability" using different criteria. Those criteria would include peaceful but substantive reforms that result in more just and legitimate forms of government.<sup>5</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Gulf regimes have survived the recent upheaval but without reforms, they could face serious challenges in the future. Still, political change in that region will be particularly challenging because all six states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - are ruled by families

that deny basic political freedoms. In their annual report on the status of democracy in the world, Freedom House rates five of the six Gulf states as “not free.” Kuwait is the exception and rated as “partly free.”<sup>6</sup> With the “Arab Awakening” as a backdrop, the US should recognize that the status quo may no longer provide the conditions supportive of its interests. The question at the present time is, how should the United States influence change and bring a different “stability” to this strategically vital part of the world and ultimately support America’s national interests in the long term?

One aspect of a new US strategy toward the Gulf might be to place greater emphasis on encouraging and facilitating democratic reforms. American foreign policy has long included such an approach and is likely to continue the practice for the foreseeable future. A vast democracy assistance apparatus is in place and in active use by American and European entities throughout the world. Therefore, as the US reevaluates its options in the Gulf, it should consider re-invigorating such programs in a region that has long been discounted with regard to its democratic potential.

This paper will explore four topics. First, it will establish the working definitions of “democracy promotion” and “democracy assistance.” Second, it will trace the evolution of US democracy assistance and outline the existing assistance apparatus. Third, it will highlight some of the prominent European democracy assistance entities that may be able to apply their resources and expertise in the Gulf. The fourth section will describe the challenges of democracy assistance, some of which are more pronounced in the Arab world. The final section will make some recommendations about the way ahead for democracy assistance in the Gulf.

## **I. Definitions of Democracy Promotion and Assistance**

The terms “democracy promotion” and “democracy assistance” are often used interchangeably, thus causing confusion within the field. Peter Burnell describes “democracy promotion” as “non-coercive attempts to spread democracy abroad for whatever reason...political intervention in the domestic affairs of countries that seeks to affect the distribution of power there mainly by patient and non-violent involvement...”<sup>7</sup> A common follow-on question is, how is “democracy promotion” different from “democracy assistance?” Daniela Huber describes “democracy assistance” as a subset of “democracy promotion,” the latter of which also includes military force and diplomatic pressure.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Carothers offers an even more precise definition of “democracy assistance,” stating that it includes those programs that are primarily intended to encourage democracy and therefore do not include those that focus on social or economic transformations.<sup>9</sup> This paper will examine the aspects of democracy assistance that include “the non-coercive programs implemented by governmental, quasi-non-governmental, and non-governmental entities that initiate, support, or strengthen political reforms to advance democracy in foreign countries.”

## **II. US Democracy Assistance**

Democracy assistance has been an important aspect of American foreign policy for most of the past century. Beginning in 1917, and through the end of his presidency, Woodrow Wilson argued that democracy was the right form of government for all nations and that the United States was justified and obligated to fight for that vision. Furthermore, peace in the world could only be realized when all countries embraced

democracy.<sup>10</sup> A generation later, on January 6, 1941, Franklin Roosevelt declared the defense and pursuit of “four freedoms” as justification for entering World War II. People of the world should have freedom of religion, speech and freedom from want and fear. Furthermore, the United States should “support” all people who sought those freedoms.<sup>11</sup> Twenty years later, President John Kennedy concluded his inaugural address with, “My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”<sup>12</sup> In 1982, President Ronald Reagan spoke to the British Parliament about his vision for a free world brought about by the established democracies.<sup>13</sup> In *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, President Clinton argued that America’s interests would be best served by expanding the democratic community.<sup>14</sup> George W. Bush continued his predecessors’ interest in encouraging democracy, and even justified regime change in certain cases, but focused his attention toward the Middle East.<sup>15</sup> President Obama’s first *National Security Strategy* stated that the United States “must support democracy” by working closely with “civil society, peaceful political opposition, and encouraging US nongovernmental actors to do the same.”<sup>16</sup> Though consistent in their advocacy for democracy promotion, the motivation of these leaders provokes debate. Some are accused of seeking freedom in other countries solely for the sake of American national security, i.e. Wilson’s desire to defend against European ambitions or Reagan’s motivation to contain communism. Others contend that the policy stems from a sense of moral obligation to help others gain freedom: democracy has been good for the US and would be good for others. Whatever the motivation, the desire to foster democracy in other countries has been a consistent goal of American administrations for generations.

Though the American interest of “promoting democracy” around the world was advocated by President Woodrow Wilson as early as 1917, it was not until the 1980s that the US established entities and devoted funding to specifically advance democracy in other countries. In the aftermath of World War II, US foreign assistance was primarily tied to security arrangements and economic development. The assistance programs began to evolve in 1966 when Title IX of the Foreign Assistance Act directed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to design programs that fostered development in other parts of the world, though they largely targeted economic systems. Human rights became an important consideration in the 1970s as illustrated by Congress’ amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act which prohibited aid to governments that committed rights violations. In the 1980s, the Reagan administration designated a portion of foreign aid for the specific purpose of encouraging democratization and countering the spread of communism.<sup>17</sup>

In 1980, a group of prominent Americans,<sup>18</sup> with ties to both political parties and labor, formed the American Political Foundation (APF) at about the same time that the Reagan administration established “Project Democracy.” The APF published a study that proposed the US government establish a quasi-autonomous non-governmental organization (QUANGO) called the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and funded by Congressional appropriation, and coordinate its operations with the State Department, yet remain largely independent of US government policy.<sup>19</sup> It further advocated for four affiliates organized along the interests of the two major political parties, American labor, and the US Chamber of Commerce. These affiliates would receive grants through the NED and funding from other sources.<sup>20</sup> The National

Democratic Institute (NDI), the International Republican Institute (IRI), the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), and the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) would operate independently, and under the auspices of, their own board of directors.<sup>21</sup> This framework appealed to lawmakers because it seemed to encompass the agendas of prominent interest groups and therefore benefit from bipartisan support in the long term.

Also during the Reagan administration, USAID shifted its focus and some resources to democracy assistance. In 1985, the agency created a democracy aid office in the Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean and then in 1994, as it expanded democracy programs in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa, USAID established the Center for Democracy and Governance as the “central clearing house” for all such programs. By the late 1990s, USAID was America’s most active democracy assistance agency.<sup>22</sup> However, at least in the Middle East, USAID’s programs declined during George W. Bush’s administration as the State Department formed a new regional democracy promotion entity in 2002 - the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) – as one part of a new American strategy following the attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>23</sup> The MEPI would focus democracy assistance on one region and address political, educational, economic, and women’s issues.<sup>24</sup>

### **III. British, European, and Multinational Democracy Assistance in the Middle East**

Like the United States, European countries also support democratization around the world. A survey of some, though not all, prominent European democracy assistance

entities will provide awareness of other programs with which the US might collaborate on future strategies in the Gulf.

Germany has an extensive history in assisting liberal reforms in other states through political party-affiliated, non-governmental organizations.<sup>25</sup> These organizations are collectively called *Stiftungen* (foundations) of which there are currently six: Friedrich Ebert (1925); Konrad Adenauer (1956); Friedrich Naumann (1958); Hanns Seidel (1966); Rosa Luxemburg (1990); and Heinrich Böll (1996/7). *Stiftungen* are aligned with the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Party, the Free Democrat Party, the Christian Social Union, the Party of Democratic Socialism and the Green Party respectively. Each of the foundations receive funding and oversight from the German *Bundestag*, but are independent of official foreign policy and they design their own programs and focus areas. African countries receive the greatest share of funding whereas the Middle East and North Africa receive the least.<sup>26</sup>

The British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) established the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) in 1992. The WFD operates under a general mandate from the FCO to support “development of pluralistic democratic practices and political institutions,” provide assistance in “democratic electoral processes,” and assist in the “formation, organisation and management of democratic political parties committed to non-violent policies and programmes.”<sup>27</sup> The Foundation receives most of its funding from the British government and is an independent public entity that organizes its programs in accordance with the agendas of the British Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and Labor parties. Its initial focus was on the newly-emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, but later included Africa and the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> WFD



was best known for its programs intended to build political parties but shifted to developing parliaments and civil society.<sup>29</sup>

Since the 1990s, the Netherlands has also engaged in democracy assistance and development in Europe and Africa. Two of the most prominent Dutch entities are Maatschappelijke Transformatie (MATRA)(1994) and the Netherlands Institute for Multi-Party Democracy (NIMD)(2000). The MATRA specializes in building and reforming state institutions. The NIMD is similar to the German *Stiftungen* and works with political parties. The Dutch entities currently apply most of their democracy assistance resources to countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.<sup>30</sup>

The European Union also formed entities that engage in democracy assistance.<sup>31</sup> Two organizations active outside the continent are the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)(2007)<sup>32</sup> and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) (1995). The EIDHR primarily focuses on development and democracy assistance through civil society programs and does not work to strengthen parties or state institutions.<sup>33</sup> As its title suggests, the EMP prioritizes its efforts in Europe and non-European states on the Mediterranean Sea to include, Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria and Turkey. Its agenda derives from the Barcelona Declaration to establish a multilateral framework for security, economic, political and cultural cooperation. The twenty-seven member states unanimously agreed to respect human rights and basic freedoms including freedom of assembly, expression and religion. The EMP programs are designed to influence state institutions, primarily the police and justice.<sup>34</sup>

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was established in the 1970s originally as a forum to facilitate dialogue between Cold War adversaries. Following the end of the Cold War, the body evolved into one that addresses today's threats to security and furthers democratic principles and institutions. Current member states include those of Europe, North America, the Caucasus and Central Asia; however, OSCE has also established "Partners for Cooperation" in Asia and the Mediterranean. In 1992, OSCE established the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which supervises the organization's election observation, democratic development, human rights and rule of law programs.<sup>35</sup>

The Council of Europe (COE) was created in 1949 under the Treaty of London. Originally formed to facilitate cooperation between Europeans on post-war concerns of economic development, human rights, and international law, the organization has expanded to 47 member states and its mandate to advocate the aforementioned issues around the world including in North Africa. Of note, in 2011, the COE pursued opportunities to assist the new government of Tunisia with conducting free elections and fostering "fair and balanced" media coverage of those elections.<sup>36</sup>

#### **IV. Democracy Assistance Challenges and Debates**

Influencing political processes and power distribution in other countries is an enormously complex endeavor and consequently, there are numerous challenges and criticisms associated with democracy assistance programs. A review of democracy assistance literature reveals several significant challenges, the greatest of which include: suspicion toward, and skepticism of, the intent of these programs; intervention

and obstruction by the recipient country's government; and accurately measuring effectiveness.<sup>37</sup>

One of the greatest challenges to democracy assistance is that international public opinion is increasingly skeptical of such programs. Surveys in recent years reveal that public opinion around the world reflects a more negative view regarding democracy assistance than it did in the first decade following the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>38</sup> These views are also evident in the Arab world, especially in the Gulf, and are particularly pronounced toward US aid. Critics accuse the US of hypocrisy and untrustworthiness and use examples such as American support to Middle East dictators, the war in Iraq and unceasing support for Israel. These examples fuel negative perceptions and suspicion toward American declared intentions to promote greater freedom and democracy in the region.<sup>39</sup>

Also challenging effective implementation of democracy assistance when executed through local NGOs is intervention into, or circumvention of, the latter by autocratic governments. Those governments may accept democracy funding or expertise because of diplomatic pressure, but they often subvert those programs. Local non-governmental organizations (NGO) that educate, train or otherwise attempt to strengthen civil society toward reform are commonly affected by such measures. One such campaign against NGOs in the Arab world began in 1996 following a meeting of the Arab League's Ministries of the Interior Committee. The representatives characterized local NGOs of all kinds but particularly those that focus on human rights, when funded by foreign entities, as prominent threats to internal security. Their concerns led some Arab leaders to enact policies to control or eliminate NGOs. For

example, when the World Bank created a Palestinian NGO fund, the Palestinian Authority (PA) established a committee to regulate the activities of NGOs while maintaining access to the \$15 million fund. Later, in 1999, the PA moved responsibility for issuing permits to NGOs from the Department of Justice to the Department of Interior, the latter of which was tied to Palestinian intelligence services and thereby sent a chilling message to NGOs.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, Egypt's Law 32 of 1964 requires all "associations" to be regulated by the government and was often used in the 1990s to curtail democracy group activities. Despite enormous pressure from the international community, the Egyptian government passed Law 153 in 1999 that further regulated the activities of "international associations" and, more importantly, directed that foreign funding intended for Egyptian NGOs be approved by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in Jordan, local NGOs are closely regulated and monitored. The Ministry of Social Development can replace NGO board members and dissolve NGOs entirely. In addition to legal and bureaucratic methods of controlling foreign funding and NGO activities, Arab governments also co-opt NGO efforts through "government organized NGOs" (GONGOs). The GONGOs are often staffed by government employees and, though they receive some foreign funding intended for liberal reform, limit change or block change altogether.<sup>42</sup> Such intervention or intimidation of NGOs can disrupt efforts by external democracy assistance entities to bring change through local organizations.

Another contentious issue surrounding democracy programs is in regards to measuring their effectiveness. Scholars and analysts are assessing, and will continue to assess, the impact that democracy assistance programs had on events where such programs were active, such as in Egypt and Tunisia. They will examine whether those

programs had a positive impact, created unrealistic expectations, or made no impact at all. The potential challenges facing those analysts will probably mirror the challenges that have long existed in measuring democracy assistance. Those challenges include defining the type of government or degree of freedom that exists within a state, designing a program suited for particular goals, and evaluating whether the program met those goals. The democracy assistance community recognizes the importance of measuring their impact and has devoted significant effort to establishing the right metrics and methods to meet the challenge. However, skepticism remains among donors and government agencies with oversight responsibilities.<sup>43</sup>

## **V. The Way Ahead for Democracy Assistance in the Gulf**

For decades, the United States, other nations, and multi-national organizations have provided democracy assistance outside their borders. Sometimes motivated by humanitarian or human rights concerns and sometimes motivated by national security interests, or a combination thereof, many nations in Africa, the Levant, Latin America and Asia have been recipients of democracy aid from wealthy states. Noticeably absent from the list of recipients however, are the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). There are three primary reasons for that omission. First, the Gulf states are generally wealthy, especially those with substantial oil reserves. Therefore, some democracy assistance entities prefer to dedicate resources to states that have a greater need and are perceived to be more receptive to liberalization in exchange for those resources.<sup>44</sup> Second, as already noted, Gulf governments allied themselves with the west and supported the latter's security interests. Transforming those regimes into

democracies could bring anti-western governments to power and threaten the existing security arrangements. Third, leaders of some of the Gulf states discouraged or prohibited democracy assistance activities. For these reasons, democracy assistance program managers looked elsewhere to influence reforms.

A new democratization strategy in the Gulf must account for the challenges listed above and be carefully and cautiously employed. Such a strategy should incorporate three elements. First, the programs should begin in one country rather than the entire GCC. This approach does not mean that programs in other Gulf countries would cease: it merely suggests that a new and comprehensive strategy should start in one country for the purpose of focusing resources and efforts. Second, the strategy should incorporate the entities, whether American or European, best suited for the desired goals. Third, the strategy should be comprehensive and seek to reform government institutions, build political parties or associations, and strengthen civil society.

The first country in which to initiate a new strategy should be the Sultanate of Oman. Oman, as will be described later, has an environment receptive to change as compared to the other Gulf states. Omanis desire reforms and the opposition, for now, is willing to work with the existing government rather than insist on removing the regime. Oman also has historical and cultural characteristics that favor democratic development.

Foreign policy discourse about the Middle East often neglects Oman. The omission is surprising considering Oman's geographical position vis-à-vis Iran, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Arabian Peninsula. One reason for the neglect is that the Gulf in general is overshadowed by the dysfunction of the rest of the Middle East. Palpable tension or outright conflict between Israel and its neighbors, the Palestinian refugee

problem, the wars in Iraq, and Iranian nuclear ambitions claim much of the attention of Middle East policy-makers, commentators and academics. Furthermore, the other countries of the Gulf eclipse Oman because the former have large oil reserves, host major US military headquarters, and control substantial financial assets. Finally, the Omanis themselves downplay ties with the United States in order to maintain a close relationship with Iran.<sup>45</sup>

The US has consistently respected Oman's desire to maintain a quiet relationship. Oman is a relatively weak state and is in a "tough neighborhood." The country must be careful to balance its relationships with all of its neighbors including Iran. Still, the US and Oman cooperate quietly in many ways. Oman authorized the use of military facilities by American forces in support of the 1980 hostage rescue attempt in Iran as well as more recent combat operations in Afghanistan. The two countries signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2006, which assists with economic diversification in preparation for the depletion of Oman's oil reserves in the next fifteen years. In 2010, the US provided Oman \$1.5 million and \$8.9 million under International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF), respectively. Moreover, the two countries' policies regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict are more closely aligned than that between the US and other Arab states. Thus, the conflict does not disrupt the US-Omani relationship to the same degree as it does the American relationships with other states in the region. For example, Oman did not end diplomatic relations with Egypt after the latter concluded the 1979 peace treaty with Israel. Sultan Qaboos hosted working groups to support the Madrid peace process. Israel is allowed to participate in the Desalination Research Center located in Oman. Finally, Oman is

the only Arab state to express interest in renewing trade ties with Israel if the latter would halt settlement construction in the West Bank.<sup>46</sup>

In regards to democracy assistance, the US has not implemented an aggressive strategy in Oman. USAID does not allocate any funding towards governance. The NED and its affiliates have minimal engagement in Oman especially when compared to their efforts in other parts of the Middle East. IRI sponsors only a single program that provides training in legislative procedures.<sup>47</sup> NDI has no ongoing programs in Oman. The MEPI sponsors seventeen programs in Oman, but they generally focus on economic development and opportunities made possible by the 2006 FTA.<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the European entities do not have robust programs in the Sultanate. The EIDHR has shifted its priorities from Eastern Europe to Asia and the Middle East. Specific to the Gulf, in 2009, the EIDHR provided financial support to the regional organization, *Bridging the Gulf*, which provided education on human rights. Though many European entities, including the EIDHR, WFD and MATRA, state the desire to do more in regions such as the Gulf, strategies to support such desires are still under development.<sup>49</sup>

In order to appreciate the potential for change in Oman, it is important to understand its recent history. Discussions about modern Oman focus on Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id Al Said and the remarkable transformation of that country during his rule. Sultan Qaboos replaced his father in 1970 following a palace coup. The new Sultan immediately confronted and ultimately defeated a fourteen-year insurgency and then turned his attention to economic and social development as well as national unification. He enacted policies that improved infrastructure, education, and health for all Omanis. In the 1990s, Qaboos instituted significant political reforms. He created a bicameral



legislature under the “Basic Law” in 1996. Omanis elect the members of the *Majlis as Shura* (Consultative Assembly) and the Sultan appoints members of the *Majlis ad Dawla* (State Assembly). Women also gained additional rights under Qaboos. He granted them the right to vote in 2003 and has appointed 14 women to the *Dawla* since its founding.<sup>50</sup> Compared to their neighbors, Omanis enjoy considerable religious toleration and economic activity with the outside world. The country is relatively safe, though without the trappings of a police state. It also attracts tourists who can freely and independently traverse most of the country.

Ibadism is the dominant form of Islam in Oman and its effect on that nation’s development is also important in any assessment of the country’s potential for democracy. Ibadism encourages leaders and communities to make decisions through consensus and consultation. It stresses moderation and toleration toward fellow members of Omani society as well as foreigners and those of different belief systems. Finally, Ibadism prescribes that communities choose leaders through elections. These tenets are deeply rooted in the Omani conscience and, over time, have established conditions conducive to democratic principles.<sup>51</sup>

Oman’s financial situation might also make it more receptive to external influence for reform than the other Gulf states. Ranked 78 of the 226 countries in the world in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Oman is the poorest of the GCC countries. Its GDP per capita is tied for last place with Saudi Arabia, but the latter’s overall GDP is nine times that of Oman and the wealth greatly empowers the Saudi ruling family. Bahrain has a lower Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than Oman, but Bahrain has one-third of Oman’s population and therefore a much higher GDP per capita.<sup>52</sup> Oman also

faces greater economic uncertainty than any other Gulf state because of its dwindling oil reserves, which are expected to be depleted by 2025.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the assumption that wealth makes the Gulf monarchies immune from economic incentives may not apply to Oman to the same degree.

In addition to the historical, religious and economic circumstances that could make Oman receptive to democracy, the population, especially the younger generation, is beginning to demand such change. Reform groups mostly consisting of younger Omanis, many of who are unemployed, and are partly motivated by the country's economic conditions.<sup>54</sup> However, they are also dissatisfied with the power structure of the government. They want a constitution that serves as a contract between the Sultan and the people, a prime minister who would share power, a *Majlis* with real legislative authority, the right to assemble and form associations, and an environment that fosters free media.<sup>55</sup> Omanis are also concerned about succession: Qaboos is over seventy years old, has no children, and has not named an heir.<sup>56</sup> For now, the opposition respects their current ruler and wants to press for change within the existing institutions. However, if changes are not forthcoming or if Qaboos' successor is viewed as illegitimate or unwilling to reform, then the opposition movement could become more aggressive and less willing to compromise with the existing government.

As discussed earlier, the US and Oman have a strong friendship and it through this friendship that America should exert diplomatic pressure on the government to foster change. A reform strategy in Oman will require the positive leadership of the Sultan. Beyond diplomatic pressure, the US should work collectively with European entities to build the democratic assistance programs "on the ground." Organizations

such as the EMP, whose North African members already have economic and cultural ties with the Sultanate, could use their expertise in security and rule of law to work with Oman's ministries. The Dutch MATRA might assist with governmental reform as well. The WFD could help transform the *Majlis* into a legislative body with real authority. A combination of the *Stiftungen*, the NIMD, IRI and NDI could raise awareness about the role of political parties in democracy. The EIDHR, which specializes in strengthening civil society could assist transition of Oman's interest groups and opposition movements into effective political and social organizations. Meanwhile, the MEPI could continue its ongoing work with Omani commercial development. The above list of democracy assistance entities and their possible roles in reforming Oman is merely provided here as examples of how Europe and the US could collaborate in one country in accordance with their strengths and specialties. A single program or combination of programs would be implemented over time as determined by the Omani government and the democracy assistance organizations.

## **Conclusion**

The Arab Awakening will be analyzed for many years but the US should consider immediately the meaning of the 2011 events in the context of the autocratic Gulf states. First, the US must reevaluate the meaning of "stability" in that part of the world. "Stability" through government oppression may not benefit American security interests in the future. Opposition movements are increasingly aggressive in their demands. Without substantive reforms they may attempt to overthrow pro-western governments. One means the US might use to help avert such a drastic development is democracy

assistance. America has employed these programs to influence change in other countries for generations and it appears that such programs will continue for the foreseeable future. Likewise, Europe has an extensive network of entities intended to bring political change to weak states. Both American and European democracy organizations generally ignored the Gulf because the latter was considered inhospitable to democracy. However, with the increasing dissatisfaction in the region, the old assumptions should be challenged. Now might be the time to initiate a carefully-designed, comprehensive democracy strategy in the Gulf. That strategy, beginning with Oman, should use the collective expertise of American and European programs to influence change in the government and civil society. If Oman and its neighbors make peaceful and substantive reforms, they may avoid a violent Gulf Awakening and create a lasting stability in that strategically-important part of the world.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John Chipman, "Strategic Survey 2011: The Annual Review of World Affairs" (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2011), 2-3; Kenneth M. Pollack, Daniel L. Bynum, et. al., Transcript from *The Arab Awakening: America and the Transformation of the Middle East* (Brookings: Washington, D.C., 2011); Olivier Roy and Thomas Friedman, Transcript from *Interpreting the Arab Spring* (Brookings: Washington, D.C., 2011); W. Andrew Terrill, *The Arab Spring and the Future of U.S. Interests and Cooperative Security in the Arab World* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011), 1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, "Middle East Democracy," *Foreign Policy* 145 (November/December 2004), 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Carothers, "Promoting Democracy and Fighting Terror," *Foreign Affairs* 82 (January/February 2003), 84-97.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Brumberg, "Democratization versus Liberalization in the Arab World: Dilemmas and Challenges for US Foreign Policy" (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005), 3, 12.

<sup>5</sup> In "Stability in the Middle East and North Africa: the other Side of Security," Anthony Cordesman summarizes this idea, "National security is normally seen in terms of military strength and internal security operations against extremists and insurgents. The upheavals that began in Tunis have highlighted the fact that national security is measured in terms of the politics, economics, and social tensions that shape national stability as well." Center for Strategic and International Studies, <http://csis.org/publication/stability-middle-east-and-north-africa-other-side-security> (accessed February 5, 2012). In July, 2011, the U.K.'s Department for International Development, Department of Defence, and Foreign and Commonwealth Office co-authored "Building Stability Overseas Strategy," that argues the point about the new meaning of stability, "The most peaceful political systems are accountable, giving everybody a voice, and trusted to manage difference and accommodate change" (11).

<sup>6</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2011: The Authoritarian Challenge to Democracy* (Washington, D.C: Freedom House, 2011), 12-16.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Burnell, Introduction to *Promoting Democracy Abroad*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Daniela Huber, "Democracy Assistance in the Middle East and North Africa: A Comparison of US and EU Policies," in *Mediterranean Politics* 13 (March 2008), 44.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carothers, "Taking Stock of US Democracy Assistance," in *American Democracy Promotion* ed. Michael Cox, G. John Ikenberry and Takashi Inoguchi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 188.

<sup>10</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *War Messages*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess. Senate Doc. No. 5, Serial No. 7264, Washington, D.C., 1917; pp. 3-8, *passim*. World War I Document Archive, [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's\\_War\\_Message\\_to\\_Congress](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson's_War_Message_to_Congress) (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Transcript of President Franklin Roosevelt's Annual Message (Four Freedoms) to Congress (January 6, 1941) <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=70&page=transcript>, (accessed 6 February 2012). Roosevelt specifically told Americans that, "This nation has placed its destiny in the hands and heads and hearts of its millions of free men and women; and its faith in freedom under the guidance of God. Freedom means the supremacy of human rights everywhere. Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. Our strength is our unity of purpose. To that high concept there can be no end save victory." The purpose of this speech was to rally support for additional defense spending. He attempted to do so by advocating for a strong America that could contribute to or even guarantee the security of other states.

<sup>12</sup> Transcript of John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address (January 20, 1961). <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=91&page=transcript> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Ronald W. Reagan "Address to Members of the British Parliament" (June 8, 1982), <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2002/06/reagans-westminster-speech> (accessed 6 February 2012). "No, democracy is not a fragile flower. Still it needs cultivating. If the rest of this century is to witness the gradual growth of freedom and democratic ideals, we must take actions to assist the campaign for democracy."

<sup>14</sup> William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*. <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/nss/nss-95.pdf> (1995). "All of America's strategic interests — from promoting prosperity at home to checking global threats abroad before they threaten our territory — are served by enlarging the community of democratic and free market nations." (page 22)

<sup>15</sup> "Remarks by President George W. Bush at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy," (November 6, 2003) <http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Barack H. Obama, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, May 2010), 37-8.

<sup>17</sup> Specifically, the US Congress amended the 1974 Foreign Assistance Act, Sections 502B and 116 to prohibit the foreign aid for governments that violated human rights unless there were "extraordinary circumstances" and American national interests were at stake. Clair Apodaca, "US Human Rights Policy and Foreign Assistance" A Short History" in *Ritsumeikan International Affairs*, Vol 3 (Kyoto, Japan: Institute of International Relations and Area Studies, 2005): 63-65. Carothers, "Taking Stock," 182-4.

<sup>18</sup> These men included George Agree, political consultant and later president of the American Political Foundation, Lane Kirkland, President of the AFL-CIO, Charles Manatt, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Frank Fahrenkopf, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, William Brock, former Republican Senator from Tennessee, US Labor Secretary under President Reagan and Chairman of the Republican National Committee and Michael Samuels, International Vice President, US Chamber of Commerce. "The Commitment to Democracy: A Bipartisan Approach," Report to President Ronald Reagan by the American Political Foundation, July 27, 1983 (Washington, D.C.: American Political Foundation), 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Carothers, "Taking Stock," 182-3.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The NED at 10," *Foreign Policy* 95 (Summer 1994), 125-6.

<sup>21</sup> "The Commitment to Democracy," 1-3. The design of the NED and its grantees were modeled after the West German *Stiftungen*. Carothers, "Taking Stock," 190. James M. Scott and Carie A. Steele, "Assisting Democrats or Resisting Dictators? The Nature and Impact of Democracy Support by the United States National Endowment for Democracy, 1990-99," *Democratization* 12 (August 2005), 441.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Carothers, "Revitalizing Democracy Assistance: The Challenge of USAID," (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2009), 9-12. Carothers, "Taking Stock," 183-5.

<sup>23</sup> Huber, 48.

<sup>24</sup> *In Support of Arab Democracy: Why and How*, Madeleine K. Albright and Vin Weber (co-chairs); Steven A. Cook (project director) (Washington, D.C: Council of Foreign Relations, 2005), 37. Marina Ottoway, "Democracy Promotion in the Middle East: Restoring Credibility," Policy Brief 60 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for

International Peace, 2008), 2. Two years later, the Bush administration also established the Millennium Challenge Account as a way to encourage economic and political reforms. However, the Gulf countries are too wealthy to qualify for these funds. "Report on the Criteria and Methodology for Determining the Eligibility of Candidate Countries for Millennium Challenge Account Assistance in FY 2011," *Federal Register*, October 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Pinto-Duschinsky contends that Germany's practice in supporting political parties in foreign countries dates back to the Bismark era, followed by their support of Bolsheviks in World War I and then the Nazi support of sympathetic parties during World War II. This tradition continued after World War II as a way to influence international affairs but not alarm other countries that might be suspicious of the former Nazi state. Michael Pinto-Duschinsky, "Foreign Political Aid: The German Political Foundations and Their US Counterparts," *International Affairs* 67 (January 1991), 34.

<sup>26</sup> Gero Erdmann, "Hesitant Bedfellows: The German Stiftungen and Party Aid in Africa – An Attempt at an Assessment," Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation Working Paper no. 184/05 (Coventry, United Kingdom: University of Warwick, December 2005), 5.

<sup>27</sup> The Westminster Foundation for Democracy Limited, *Annual Report and Accounts, 2009/2010*, Presented to the House of Commons, July 26, 2010: 5.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Burnell, *Building Better Democracies: Why Political Parties Matter* (London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2004). "WFD Business Plan, 2011-12," Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 44-53.

<sup>29</sup> Westminster Foundation for Democracy, <http://www.wfd.org> (accessed February 3, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Jos van Wersch and Jeroen de Zeeuw, "Mapping European Democracy Assistance" (The Hague: Netherlands Institute for International Relations, 2005), 25-33.

<sup>31</sup> The 1992 Maastricht Treaty includes the goals of developing and consolidating democracy and the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. *Maastricht Treaty*, 1992; Title V, Article J.1.2.

<sup>32</sup> The EIDHR replaced the European *Initiative* for Democracy and Human which had operated from 2000 to 2006.

<sup>33</sup> The European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/eidhr\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/eidhr_en.htm) (accessed 3 Feb 2012). Huber, 52-53.

<sup>34</sup> Huber, 53. Haizam Amirah Fernandez and Richard Youngs, eds., Introduction to *The EMP Partnership: Assessing the First Decade* (Madrid: FRIDE, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, "Factsheet: What is OSCE?," 10 January 2012, <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/35775> (accessed 31 March 2012).

<sup>36</sup> The Council of Europe, "Council of Europe and the Arab Spring," [www.coe.int/web/coe-portal/council-of-europe-and-arab-spring](http://www.coe.int/web/coe-portal/council-of-europe-and-arab-spring) (accessed 31 March 2012.)

<sup>37</sup> *In Support of Arab Democracy*, 13-14; Carothers, "Revitalizing Democracy Assistance," 33; Gerardo L. Munck, *Measuring Democracy: A Bridge Between Scholarships and Politics* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 5-13.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash Against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March/April 2006): 55-68. Burnell, "International Democracy Promotion: A Role for Public Goods Theory," in *Promoting Democracy Abroad*, 169-194, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 186-7. Burnell, *Promoting Democracy Abroad*.

<sup>39</sup> *In Support of Arab Democracy*, 35-37.

<sup>40</sup> Remi Hammami, "Palestinian NGOs Since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements," in *Middle East Report* 214 (Spring 2000), 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> Julia Pitner, "NGO's Dilemmas," in *Middle East Report* 214 (Spring 2000), 34-5.

<sup>42</sup> Shadi Hamid, "Civil Society in the Arab World and the Dilemma of Funding," October, 2010, [http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2010/10\\_middle\\_east\\_hamid.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2010/10_middle_east_hamid.aspx) (accessed 12 February 2012).

<sup>43</sup> USAID employed a research team to conduct extensive analysis on its effectiveness in democracy promotion in 2005. This was the most comprehensive analysis of such programs to date. National Research Council "Improving Democracy Assistance: Building Knowledge through Evaluations and Research" (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005). However, the democracy assistance entities acknowledge that they must continue to develop their methodologies. "Democracy Promotion Programs Funded by the US Government," Report to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress (Washington, D.C.: 1994). Thomas Carothers, "The NED at 10," *Foreign Policy* 95 (Summer 1994), 125-6. Burnell, "From Evaluating Democracy Assistance to Appraising Democracy Promotion," in *Promoting Democracy Abroad*, 143-165, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 156-164. Munck, 5-13

<sup>44</sup> Tom Pierre Najem, "Good Governance," in *Good Governance in the Middle East Oil Monarchies*, ed. Tom Pierre Najem and Martin Hetherington (New York: Routledge, 2003), 14.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Katzman, *Oman: Reform, Security, and US Policy* (Washington, D.C: US Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, Aug 26, 2011), 11-12.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-15.

<sup>47</sup> International Republican Institute, "Gulf Program Overview" (Washington, D.C.: International Republican Institute, 2010), 1.

<sup>48</sup> Middle East Partnership Initiative, "Oman Country Profile," March 20, 2010, [http://www.abudabi.mepi.state.gov/currentprojectsby\\_countryoman.html](http://www.abudabi.mepi.state.gov/currentprojectsby_countryoman.html) (accessed November 4, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> The European Commission, [http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/eidhr\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/how/finance/eidhr_en.htm) (accessed 3 Feb 2012). Sonia Herrero, *A Decade of Democracy Promotion Through the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights* (Brussels: European Partnership for Democracy, 2009), 29-35. Burnell, *Building Better Democracies*, 25-27. Huber, 52-53.

<sup>50</sup> Marc Valeri, "Liberalization from Above: Political Reforms and Sultanism in Oman," in *Constitutional Reform and Political Participation in the Gulf*, ed. Abdulhadi Khalaf and Giacoko Luciani (Dubai, United Arab Emirates: Gulf Research Center, 2006), 189-193.

<sup>51</sup> Hussein Ghubash, *Oman – The Islamic Democratic Tradition*, trans. Mary Turton (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2-3, 200-203.



<sup>52</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Oman," "Saudi Arabia," "Bahrain," "Qatar," "Kuwait," and "United Arab Emirates," in *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/> (accessed November 10, 2011).

<sup>53</sup> Katzman, *Oman*, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Oman's unemployment rate was last measured at 15% in 2004. The overall GCC average is 4.2%. Elizabeth Broomhall, *Arabian Business*, "Bahrain and Oman have highest Gulf unemployment rates," 11 July 2011, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/bahrain-oman-have-highest-gulf-unemployment-rates-409116.html> (accessed 1 April 2012). Angus McDowall, *Wall Street Journal*, "Protests in Oman Sputter," 2 March 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703409904576174571884664378.html> (accessed 1 April 2012).

<sup>55</sup> Said Sultan al Hashimi, "The Omani Spring: Towards the Break of a New Dawn," *Arab Reform Brief* 52 (Arab Reform Initiative, November 2011), 6-8.

<sup>56</sup> Katzman, *Oman*, 2-3. The Sultan has established a succession process. The "Ruling Family Council" will meet to designate a successor within three days of Qaboos' death. If they fail to select someone, they will unseal a letter left by Qaboos in which he names the next Sultan. This process is controversial in Oman because it contradicts the Ibadi idea of consensus and election. Valeri, 192-3.

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